

The following public comment was read and submitted by one of the volunteers to WTVS Detroit Public Television at The Dearborn Town Meeting on the Future of Media, Sept. 14, 2004:

Comments regarding localism and the role of public television by Dr. Jennifer Mendez, Director for Education and Graduate Certification, Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University, Detroit.

Mr. Chairman, my name is Dr. Jennifer Mendez. For the past five years I've been a resident in Detroit working in gerontology at Wayne State University. My focus is Aging Issues with particular emphasis on our ethnic elders.

As you consider localism in broadcasting, I urge you to look at the way local PUBLIC TELEVISION SHARES THE POWER OF THE MASS MEDIA WITH THE PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY. It is a model to be preserved and encouraged. I will give you one example, that of a wonderful community partnership that my colleagues and I in the field of aging have had with WTVS Detroit Public Television.

In 2003 and 2004, respectively, our local PBS station broadcast two programs - "Thou Shalt Honor" and "The Forgetting" - about care giving to the old and disabled and particular approaches in dealing with Alzheimer's. Just running the programs in prime time would have been a service, but what sets public television apart is that it also reached out to me and my colleagues in gerontology to come in and answer phone calls from viewers in need of help, which gave its viewers access to high level information and resources. Some 25 physicians, social workers, attorneys, representatives from Social Security and academia agreed to respond to phone calls from seniors and adult children who care for them. During and after each broadcast, we responded to more than 200 calls on issues ranging from Medicaid to some extremely emotional calls from people desperate for assistance in what can seem an impossible task. Our calls came from Michigan, Ohio, and Canada. The broadcast allowed both the station and the University to reach older adults and their families, who we normally would not have been able to serve. Please do not underestimate the importance of the wonderful MODEL OF PUBLIC TELEVISION - WITH ITS LOCAL STATIONS - DIFFERENT FROM CENTRALIZED CABLE NETWORKS.

Additionally, I volunteer at Detroit Public TV. I did this previously in Milwaukee. My first call in Detroit was from the volunteer coordinator at WTVS. She had been sent a letter from Milwaukee Public TV, without my knowledge, letting her know they were losing a valued volunteer and wanted her aware of my interest and love for Public TV. They all really care about us as people.

They also care about INTERNATIONAL NEWS, with programs like The Newshour and BBC World News, which analyze news from my home country Pakistan. No other station in Detroit does that. I read recently that the proportion of international news on American TV networks has fallen from 45% to 13% in the last 30 years. I am not the only person in Detroit who will tell you this, but without Detroit Public Television, some of us would have no information about what is happening in our places of birth.

Lastly, I want to tell you that WTVS produces 7 WEEKLY LOCAL SHOWS, ranging from the arts to American Black Journal to activities for children and their families. I applaud them for offering us these informative, diverse, programs, and also for being so involved in the community.

MY REQUEST: I would like to ask you to do everything you can to insure that public TV continues in the digital era to be granted the highest level of ACCESS TO REACH ALL VIEWERS of all incomes whether they pick it up by cable, satellite, or with rabbit ears. Believe me, people of all walks of life use this valuable resource.

THANK YOU for the opportunity to present my thoughts to you this evening.